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SUBJECT: CONFERENCE ON IRAQ'S ANTI-CORRUPTION STRATEGY

REF: BAGHDAD 2520

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY. Leaders of Iraq's main anti-corruption institutions held a conference with UNDP project managers and officials of the UN Office of Drugs and Crime (UNODC) in Amman September 7-10 to put finishing touches on Iraq's national strategy for compliance with the UN Convention against Corruption. The GOI expects to unveil the strategy in late October, and it will provide donors a good framework for aid programs in anti-corruption and other areas. ACCO is convening a NGO forum September 28 to promote NGO involvement in anti-corruption efforts, consistent with precepts of Iraq's new strategy. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (SBU) Following up on meetings last April with UNODC and UNDP officials, Iraqi anti-corruption officials and NGO's met in Amman September 7-10 to refine Iraq's emerging anti-corruption strategy (Ref A). Representatives from Iraq's Board of Supreme Audit (BSA), the Commission on Integrity (COI), Inspectors General from key ministries, the Central Bank, the Council of Representatives and elements of civil society attended the workshop. Ali al-Alaq, the Secretary General of Iraq's Council of Ministers who chairs the Joint Anti Corruption Committee for the Prime Minister also attended, along with Embassy Anti-Corruption Coordinator and staff members.

¶3. (SBU) The Iraqis convened six working groups to flesh out ideas on: improving protection for witnesses and whistleblowers; crafting codes of conduct (including creating conflict of interest guidelines for public officials); improving Iraq's civil code and rules on political party finances; and clarifying terms of political appointments in public service. UN officials provided feedback and finalized with Iraqi principals a new draft strategy, mechanisms for implementation, and roll-out plans for Iraq's governorates. The committees also recommended that Iraq improve transparency of political party and campaign financing and create firewalls between government institutions and political party operations.

Key Challenges

¶4. (SBU) The draft strategy focuses extensively on improving cooperation among ministries, improving the legal framework and regulations governing Iraq's public workforce, and increasing citizen awareness of government actions, including budgeting. It prescribes 18 areas for corrective action designed to secure Iraq's compliance with UNCAC. These include promoting a market economy; implementing civil service reform; improving media coverage of judicial process in corruption cases; executing reforms to the judicial and financial systems, including enhanced budget transparency; more transparent public procurement; and new education and media initiatives.

Keeping the Public on Board

¶5. (SBU) Participants noted the challenges of focusing public attention on the new strategy, once unveiled. UNDP Director in Amman Paolo Lembo stressed the importance of public awareness campaigns to gain buy-in from Iraqis, a theme echoed by Iraqi NGOs that attended.

¶6. (SBU) Commission on Integrity head Judge Raheem al-Ugaily told Iraqi media at the conference that anti-corruption is a "new concept" that needs constant outreach to both government and society. He said international assistance was critical and stressed the need to secure passage of key legislation (e.g., the proposed comprehensive anti-corruption law) for thorough implementation of the strategy.)

¶7. (SBU) In his statement at the conference, COM SecGen Alaq expressed satisfaction with the discussion, saying they had advanced anti-corruption efforts and promoted strengthening of Iraq's anti-corruption efforts and promoted strengthening of Iraq's institutional capacity. Alaq thanked the UN and US for their support, and agreed with Ugaily that international inputs were critical to success of the effort. While Iraqi leaders had developed a "strategic framework" he noted, "we still need the support of the organizations that have the expertise in this area to help guide outcomes."

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: The conference brings to fruition a months-long effort by the GOI to devise a strategy that, if implemented effectively, will result in substantial progress toward Iraq's long-term goal of fashioning a strong anti-corruption regime. The draft strategy, while still subject to some alterations in the next month, offers a fairly honest assessment of key challenges and will help both the GOI and donors better consolidate efforts. The conference was noteworthy for the presence of NGOs as well as the three independent anti-corruption agencies, parliament and the council of ministers. ACCO is convening a forum September 28 to promote NGOs' involvement in anti-corruption efforts consistent with the new strategy and UNCAC provisions.

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